United Nations A/60/999

General Assembly

Distr.: General
5 September 2006

Original: English

Sixtieth session
Agenda item 116
Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–5	2
II.	Proceedings	6–40	2
	A. Role and authority of the General Assembly	15–27	3
	B. Role of the General Assembly in the selection of the Secretary-General	28–33	5
	C. Working methods of the General Assembly	34–40	6
III.	Adoption of the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group	41	7
IV.	Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly	42	7

06-48561 (E) 060906

I. Introduction

1. In paragraphs 4 and 5 of its resolution 59/313 of 12 September 2005, the General Assembly decided to establish an ad hoc working group open to all Member States to identify ways to further enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the General Assembly, inter alia, by building on relevant Assembly resolutions and reviewing the agenda and working methods of the Assembly; and decided also that the ad hoc working group should submit a report with specific recommendations to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session.

2. This report and the recommendations contained therein are submitted pursuant to that request.

3. In his letter of 29 November 2005, the President of the General Assembly appointed Solvejga Silkalna, Permanent Representative of Latvia, and Abdullah Alsaidi, Permanent Representative of Yemen, to serve as Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

4. In their letter dated 16 January 2005, in which they invited all delegations to assist them in identifying ways to further enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the General Assembly, the Co-Chairs identified three key elements to be dealt with by the Working Group in pursuing its mandate:

(a) To review the agenda of the General Assembly, in order to avoid redundancy;

(b) To examine the role of the Assembly in the light of current political realities, in order to enhance its credibility, authority and visibility;

(c) To propose reforms to the working methods of the Assembly, in order to make it more effective and efficient.

5. The Co-Chairs also stated their intention to assess the impact of previous relevant Assembly resolutions and, as far as possible, to promote further implementation of the recommendations contained therein.

II. Proceedings

6. The Working Group held 12 meetings, on 16 February, 3, 16 and 29 March, 6, 19 and 26 April, 6 and 29 June, 21 July and 1 and 5 September 2006. At the request of the Co-Chairs an open-ended drafting group was established to work on specific aspects of the recommendations. It met on 26, 28 and 31 July and 3 and 8 August under the chairmanship of Mexico; on 22, 23 and 25 August under the chairmanship of New Zealand; and on 1 and 5 September under the chairmanship of Canada.

7. At its first three meetings, on 16 February, 3 and 16 March, the Working Group held a general debate to identify ways to further enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the General Assembly, inter alia, by building on relevant Assembly resolutions and reviewing the agenda and working methods of the Assembly.

8. At the 1st meeting, on 16 February, several delegations requested information from the Secretariat on the state of implementation of previous resolutions on the

revitalization of the General Assembly. In response to that request, and in order to facilitate the work of the Working Group, an informal background note was prepared by the Secretariat and circulated to all Member States before the 2nd meeting.

9. At the 2nd meeting, on 3 March, the Director of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division presented the informal note to the Working Group and answered questions posed by Member States. Further, members of the Working Group requested from the Secretariat an informal note on the work of the Main Committees on revitalization, which was duly submitted by the Secretariat in advance of the following meeting, held on 16 March.

10. At its 4th meeting, on 29 March, the Working Group decided to reverse the order of the topics considered at the last two thematic meetings. Accordingly, after the first two thematic meetings, which focused on the role and authority of the General Assembly, the third thematic meeting, held on 19 April, was devoted to the role of the General Assembly in the process of selecting the Secretary-General. The fourth and final thematic meeting, held on 26 April, was devoted to the working methods and agenda of the General Assembly.

11. The President of the General Assembly, who attended the 4th meeting, on 29 March, delivered an address on the role and the authority of the General Assembly in ongoing United Nations reforms, focusing also on its impact on the revitalization process and its role in the selection of the Secretary-General.

12. At its 4th to 7th meetings, on 29 March and on 6, 19 and 26 April, the Working Group held thematic debates on the following clusters, as proposed by the Co-Chairs: role and authority of the General Assembly (29 March and 6 April); role of the General Assembly in selecting the Secretary-General (19 April); and working methods and agenda of the General Assembly (26 April).

13. At the conclusion of the 7th meeting, the Co-Chairs thanked delegations for their interest and suggestions. They indicated their intention to compile the information, requests and recommendations that had been provided to them by Member States, and their plan to revert to delegations with their consolidation of those ideas, which would be in the form of recommendations for elements of a draft resolution for adoption by the Assembly.

14. The open-ended drafting group met, at the request of the Co-Chairs, on 26, 28 and 31 July and on 3 and 8 August under the chairmanship of Mexico, on 22, 23 and 25 August under the chairmanship of New Zealand; and on 1 and 5 September under the chairmanship of Canada. Its efforts focused on further refining its common understanding of issues including the role and authority of the General Assembly, the selection of the Secretary-General, and the working methods of the General Assembly.

A. Role and authority of the General Assembly

15. The Working Group identified issues surrounding the role and authority of the General Assembly as central to efforts to revitalize it. Deep concern was expressed by some regarding the relationship and balance of roles between the Security Council and the General Assembly.

16. The Working Group felt strongly that the relationships between the General Assembly and other principal organs of the United Nations should continue to be strengthened. As a general principle, delegations insisted, any approach to addressing the relationship between the principal organs should be one based upon cooperation and the need for balance, and must respect the roles of the principal organs under the Charter.

17. Several delegations stated their view that the best way of revitalization was the consideration of topics of essential importance to the Organization as a whole by the General Assembly and that it was the responsibility of Member States to have the General Assembly seized with such topics.

18. Several delegations reiterated their views on the need for the General Assembly to convene and organize major thematic debates in order to facilitate broad international understanding on current substantive issues of importance to Member States.

19. The point was also frequently underlined that the role of the General Assembly on matters of peace and security should be reaffirmed, for while it was acknowledged that the Security Council has primary responsibility in this area, in accordance with Article 24 of the Charter, it was also clearly recalled that that mandate is not exclusive. The General Assembly should enhance its examination and discussion of issues of international peace and security in accordance with Articles 10, 11, 12 and 13 of the Charter.

20. Delegations also raised specific points regarding two types of reports from the Security Council to the General Assembly, namely the annual report of the Security Council and its special subject-oriented reports. Some speakers reiterated their request that the former should be more analytical and presented in a timely manner before the commencement of the general debate. Regarding the latter, it was noted that no special subject-oriented reports had yet been submitted or presented by the Council and that these would be highly welcome.

21. The need for enhanced complementarity between the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly was also flagged by a number of speakers, some of whom suggested that this might be achieved in part through a review of the Council's work distribution. Further, delegations expressed the desire that the report of the Council to the Assembly be more analytical and streamlined. They also felt that further effort should be made to avoid overlap between the Economic and Social Council and the Second and Third Committees.

22. On one aspect of strengthening the Office of the President of the General Assembly, a number of delegations encouraged the submission by each outgoing President of a short report on lessons learned, emphasizing the importance of continuity in the transfer from President to President and of acquiring and cementing institutional memory.

23. On the issue of the content and impact of General Assembly resolutions, a number of speakers continued to underline the need to make resolutions more concise and action-oriented, including by reducing the number of preambular paragraphs. A majority of those speakers also stressed that future resolutions should clearly add value to existing ones.

24. On the implementation of resolutions, some speakers also referred to a possible role for the Secretariat in providing information on the implementation and status of resolutions dealing with the role and authority of the General Assembly. Some agreed that focus and stress should remain on the implementation of the Assembly's resolutions, as this in itself is one of the keys to its revitalization. They suggested that obstacles impeding the implementation of resolutions could be identified and that possible mechanisms to monitor the implementation of resolutions and mandates should be developed.

25. While a number of delegations upheld the important role that non-governmental organizations and civil society play in enhancing the Assembly's work and outreach, most of them nevertheless emphasized that consultation between the General Assembly and other actors should be carried out in accordance with the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and that the Assembly's intergovernmental nature should be preserved.

26. Some delegations encouraged further raising the visibility of the General Assembly, a few of them specifically supporting the efforts of the Department of Public Information in this endeavour, and some others particularly noting the need to encourage the participation of the mass media of developing countries in the Assembly's work and their coverage of it.

27. On 19 April, the Co-Chairs presented the Working Group with a report on the meeting of the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council held on 18 April, at which the President of the Security Council provided an update on the Security Council's progress with regard to the selection of the next Secretary-General. The report was welcomed by a number of delegations, and it was subsequently circulated in writing to the Working Group.

B. Role of the General Assembly in the selection of the Secretary-General

28. A number of delegations underlined the "partnership" between the Security Council and the General Assembly in the selection of the Secretary-General, in accordance with Article 97 of the Charter.

29. A number of speakers highlighted the relevance of Assembly resolutions 11(I) of 1946 and 51/241 in elaborating the procedures for the selection of the Secretary-General, some advocating an amendment to resolution 11(I) that would call for the Security Council to recommend more than one candidate to the General Assembly.

30. Many delegations addressing this issue expressed the view that the process of selecting the Secretary-General needed to be more transparent and that the relevant provisions in the annex to resolution 51/241 should be taken into consideration regarding the involvement of the Assembly in the selection process.

31. On the issue of the criteria for and qualities of candidates for the post of Secretary-General, the merits of having standards in place as a guide to selection were appreciated, but many speakers on this point were of the view that such criteria should be limited and general in nature. In addition, many underlined the importance of Member States being fully aware of the qualifications of candidates, as well as the pressing need for appropriate mechanisms to be devised that would serve this purpose.

32. With regard to the issues of regional rotation and gender equality, many delegations indicated that resolution 51/241, in particular its paragraph 59, should be reaffirmed. A number of speakers also suggested that the mandate of future Secretaries-General should be limited to a single term, arguing that this would remove any basis for suggestion that the Secretary-General's conduct could or might be influenced by expectation of reappointment.

33. Some of those addressing this issue also supported the possibility of a deadline being established by which candidacies for the post of Secretary-General should be submitted, believing that this would allow the building of broad support for a candidate to begin earlier. To ensure a smooth transition between the incoming and outgoing Secretaries-General, however, they felt that the existing provisions of paragraph 61 of the annex to resolution 51/241 were sufficient.

C. Working methods of the General Assembly

34. Many in the Working Group continued to call for a shorter agenda for the General Assembly. In this regard, the role that political considerations played in implementation and in the choice of items and preparation of resolutions was underlined. All agreed, nonetheless, that the right of Member States to decide on tabling resolutions must continue to be preserved.

35. Some delegations indicated that the way in which the General Assembly takes its decisions, specifically the tendency towards the adoption of resolutions without a vote, should be discussed in the context of the revitalization of the General Assembly.

36. A few delegations recalled the request that the consolidated version of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly be made available in all official languages in print and online. Some of them also suggested the role that the Office of Legal Affairs might play in the documentation of procedures and precedents that would lead to the consolidation of best practices, and expressed the hope that this possibility might be investigated further.

37. While delegations focusing on the work and revitalization of the Main Committees acknowledged that the Committees themselves should decide on their own agendas, many nonetheless felt that rationalization of the agenda overall required a strengthened role for the General Committee, which must oversee the distribution of work, and that this role should also be encouraged. Some delegations also highlighted the importance of streamlining the working methods of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, while other delegations stated that any such efforts must be made by the Committee itself. A number of delegations emphasized that the General Assembly should not be overly prescriptive in managing the work of the subsidiary bodies, including the Special Committee.

38. A number of speakers on the issue of working methods noted that the General Committee had not made any recommendations on it since the adoption of resolution 58/316. They strongly encouraged it to make proposals on a more regular basis regarding the biennialization, triennialization, clustering and elimination of agenda items, though they acknowledged that the General Committee should avoid delving into substantive matters. A number of those concerned with this issue also encouraged joint informal debates between the Second and Third Committees.

39. On election procedures, a number of delegations recalled the issue of utilization of optical scanners to expedite counting in elections, as recommended in paragraph 15 of resolution 59/313, and urged the continued pursuit of this technology.

40. With regard to documentation, some delegations repeated their call for reports to be more concise and analytical.

III. Adoption of the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group

41. At its 12th meeting, on 5 September, the Ad Hoc Working Group considered and adopted a draft resolution (see para. 42) and the present report for consideration by the General Assembly at its sixtieth session.

IV. Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly

42. At its 12th meeting, on 5 September 2006, the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly concluded its work for the sixtieth session of the General Assembly. The Ad Hoc Working Group decided to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Revitalization of the General Assembly

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming the central position of the General Assembly as the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations, as well as the role of the Assembly in the process of standard-setting and the codification of international law,

Reaffirming also the authority of the General Assembly and the strengthening of its role on global matters of concern to the international community, as set out in the Charter of the United Nations, and reaffirming its central role in the reform process,

Recognizing that the General Assembly is the universal and representative forum comprising all Members of the United Nations,

Stressing the need fully to respect and maintain the balance between the principal organs of the United Nations within their respective purviews and mandates, in accordance with the Charter,

Reaffirming that the plenary meetings of the General Assembly should constitute a forum for high-level policy statements, as well as for the consideration, inter alia, of agenda items of special importance or urgency,

Underlining the importance of providing adequate resources for the implementation of mandated programmes and activities,

Reaffirming its authority in the consideration of all budgetary issues, as stipulated in the Charter,

Reaffirming also its previous resolutions relating to the revitalization of its work, in particular resolutions 58/126 of 19 December 2003, 58/316 of 1 July 2004 and 59/313 of 12 September 2005,

Recalling its resolution 51/241 of 31 July 1997,

Noting, with appreciation, the report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly established by General Assembly resolution 59/313,

Decides to adopt the text contained in the annex to the present resolution.

Annex

The General Assembly,

Cluster 1. Role and authority of the General Assembly

In the context of further strengthening the role and authority of the General Assembly as set out in the Charter of the United Nations,

1. *Reaffirms* the role and the authority of the General Assembly, including on questions relating to international peace and security, as stipulated in Articles 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 35 of the Charter of the United Nations, where appropriate using the procedures set forth in rules 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, which enable swift and urgent action by the Assembly, bearing in mind that the Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in accordance with Article 24 of the Charter;

2. *Urges* the Presidents of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council to meet periodically to ensure increased cooperation and coordination of their work programmes in accordance with their respective responsibilities under the Charter; the President of the General Assembly shall inform Member States about the outcome of those meetings on a regular basis;

3. *Encourages* the holding of thematic interactive debates on current issues of critical importance to the international community in the General Assembly, and invites the President of the General Assembly to propose themes for such interactive debates, in consultation with Member States;

4. *Invites* the Security Council to further its initiatives to improve the quality of its annual report to the General Assembly, mandated by Article 24, paragraph 3, of the Charter, in order to provide the General Assembly with a substantive and analytical report;

5. In carrying out the assessment of the debate on the annual report of the Security Council called for in resolution 51/241, annex, paragraph 12, the President shall inform the General Assembly of his decision regarding the need for further consideration of the report of the Security Council, including in respect of the convening of informal consultations, on the need for, and content of, any action by the Assembly based on the debate, as well as on any matters to be brought to the attention of the Security Council;

6. *Invites* the Security Council to update the General Assembly on a regular basis on the steps it has taken or is contemplating with respect to improving its reporting to the Assembly;

7. *Also invites* the Security Council to submit periodically, in accordance with Articles 15 and 24 of the Charter, special subject-oriented reports to the General Assembly for its consideration on issues of current international concern;

8. *Invites* the Economic and Social Council to continue to prepare its report to the General Assembly in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996, striving to make it more concise and action-oriented, by highlighting the critical areas requiring action by the General Assembly and, as appropriate, by making specific recommendations for consideration by the Member States;

9. *Requests* the President of the General Assembly, at the end of his/her tenure, to provide an informal short report on best practices and lessons learned to his/her successor;

10. *Takes note* of paragraph 3 (b) of its resolution 59/313, and also takes note of paragraph 9 of its resolution 60/246 of 23 December 2005, by which two additional positions at management and senior levels were made available to the Office of the President of the General Assembly within the programme budget for biennium 2006-2007, as part of the effort to strengthen the Office of the President of the General Assembly;

11. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to make the necessary arrangements for the provision of transitional office accommodation and other support to the President-elect of the General Assembly, in accordance with resolution 58/126;

12. *Encourages* enhanced interaction, as and where appropriate, with civil society, including non-governmental organizations, in particular those from developing countries, on relevant issues, while fully respecting the intergovernmental nature of the General Assembly and in conformity with the relevant rules of procedure;

13. *Encourages*, where appropriate, the continued cooperation between the General Assembly and national and regional parliaments, particularly through the Interparliamentary Union;

14. *Requests* the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the work of the General Assembly;

15. *Urges* the Secretariat to continue its endeavours to raise the visibility of the General Assembly and, to that end, requests the rearrangement of items in the *Journal of the United Nations* so that listings of plenary meetings and other major events of the General Assembly may appear alongside those of the meetings of the Security Council;

16. *Encourages* the Presidents of the General Assembly to increase their public visibility, including through enhanced contacts with representatives of the media and civil society, thus promoting the activities of the General Assembly, and encourages the Secretary-General to continue the practice of providing to the Office of the President of the General Assembly a Spokesperson for the President of the General Assembly and an assistant to the Spokesperson;

Cluster II. Selection of the Secretary-General

17. *Recalls* Article 97 of the Charter, as well as the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 11(I) of 24 January 1946 and 51/241, as relevant to the role of the General Assembly in appointing the Secretary-General, upon the recommendation of the Security Council;

18. *Emphasizes*, bearing in mind the provisions of Article 97 of the Charter, the need for the process of selection of the Secretary-General to be inclusive of all Member States and made more transparent and that, in the course of the identification and appointment of the best candidate for the post of Secretary-General, due regard be given to regional rotation and gender equality, and invites the Security Council to regularly update the General Assembly on the steps it has taken in this regard;

19. *Encourages*, without prejudice to the role of the principal organs as enshrined in Article 97 of the Charter, the President of the General Assembly to consult with Member States to identify potential candidates endorsed by a Member State and, upon informing all Member States of the results, to forward those results to the Security Council;

20. *Encourages* formal presentation of candidatures for the position of Secretary-General in a manner that allows sufficient time for interaction with Member States, and requests candidates to present their views to all Member States of the General Assembly;

21. *Recalls* paragraph 61 of its resolution 51/241, in which it stated that, in order to ensure a smooth and effective transition, the Secretary-General should be appointed as early as possible, preferably no later than one month before the date on which the term of the incumbent expires;

22. *Emphasizes* the importance of candidates for the post of Secretary-General possessing and displaying, inter alia, commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, extensive leadership, and administrative and diplomatic experience;

Cluster III. Working methods

23. *Reaffirms* the sovereign right of Member States to submit proposals in the context of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, and encourages Member States to submit draft resolutions in a more concise, focused and action-oriented form;

24. *Requests* the Secretary-General to issue the rules of procedure of the General Assembly in a consolidated version in all official languages, in print and online, and requests the Office of Legal Affairs to make precedents and past practice available in the public domain with respect to rules and practices of the intergovernmental bodies of the Organization;

25. *Requests* the Main Committees to continue their efforts to further rationalize their agendas and to improve their working methods, and invites the Bureaux of the Main Committees to enhance their cooperation, in conformity with the rules of procedure;

26. *Decides*, in that respect, to give due consideration to those recommendations of the Main Committees regarding the improvement of their working methods and the allocation of agenda items which require the approval of the General Assembly for their implementation;

27. *Reiterates its call* for the effective implementation of rule 42 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly;

28. *Requests* an update on its recommendation, in paragraph 15 of its resolution 59/313, regarding consideration of the use of optical scanners as a means of expediting the counting of votes cast through secret ballots during elections, taking due account of the security requirements in this regard and the credibility, reliability and confidentiality of such means, and requests the Secretary-General to report on the modalities thereof to the General Assembly;

29. *Requests* the Secretary-General to implement further the measures set out in paragraph 20 of resolution 57/300 of 20 December 2002 on the consolidation of reports and in paragraph 6 of the annex to resolution 58/316, on documentation;

30. *Recalls* paragraph 19 of its resolution 59/313, and requests the Secretary-General to submit a status report with a factual chart to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session on the implementation of all resolutions regarding the revitalization of its work, including resolutions 58/126, 58/316 and 59/313, and the present resolution;

31. *Decides* to invite the President of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly to convene consultations among Member States to decide on the establishment of an ad hoc working group on the revitalization of the General Assembly, open to all Member States, to identify ways to further enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the General Assembly, inter alia, by building on relevant Assembly resolutions and reviewing the agenda and working methods of the Assembly, and to submit a report to the Assembly at its sixty-first session.